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Brazil

Dissidents form PSoL to defend socialist ideal

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An interview with Heloãsa Helena.

A new left party led by parliamentarians expelled from the PT made a significant advance last weekend. At a founding meeting held in the federal capital, Brasilia, nearly 700 activists from various regions of the country participated in choosing a name, adopting statutes and approving the provisional programme of the Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSoL, pronounced "sol" in reference to the Portuguese word for "sun").

The organization, which sees itself as an alternative on the spectrum of left parties, already has a president, senator Heloãsa Helena, elected for the PT from the state of Alagoas. In addition to her, the new parliamentary group will include the former PT deputies Babá (from the state of Pará), João Fontes (from the state of Sergipe) and Luciana Genro (from the state of Rio Grande do Sul), who is the daughter of the Education Minister, Tarso Genro. All have suffered political isolation after having voted against social security reform in Congress - a process that culminated with their expulsion for indiscipline at the meeting of the PT national leadership held on December 2003.

Most of those present at the founding meeting of the PSoL originate from the Socialist Democracy current (DS) of the PT - in the new organization they have formed a tendency called Red Liberty - or from dissident elements of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) and the Socialist Party of United Workers (PSTU), as well as public sector trades unionists (teachers in particular), the MTL peasant movement and independent groups. According to one of the 16 members of the executive of the new party, for most activists it represents the "final attempt" to build an institutional party. Among the "personalities" who have joined the new group are the sociologist Chico de Oliveira and the academic Paulo Arantes.

In order to participate fully in the elections, the PSoL still needs to succeed in its "campaign of legalization" - that is, gather the signatures needed to register. "On the day of the municipal elections in November 2004, the "brigades of the PSoL" will spread across Brazil to gather the 438,000 signatures. We will hold seminars in every state - both to satisfy the formalities and the "bureaucratic weights" to which we are subjected and to refine the provisional programme and statutes that we have adopted. Finally, in January [2005], we will hold our second national meeting during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre", said the president of the new party.

The senator, who says she devoted "the best years of her life" to helping build the PT, criticized the government in that it now contributes to "the deepening of the same neoliberal policies which were limited by the participation of the PT in opposition, whether in the social movements or Parliament". "We feel ourselves obliged to build a political refuge, to safeguard the banner of the labouring classes, and the ideological and programmatic elaborations accumulated throughout the history of the socialist left" she continued. We print here extracts from the interview that senator Heloãsa Helena - potential PsoL candidate for the Brazilian presidency in 2006 - gave to Agence Carta Maior (ACM) shortly after the end of the first national meeting of the country's newest party.

What is the main difference between the programme of the PSoL and those of the other parties of the left that already exist?

Today, the other parties behave as instruments of the triumphalist propaganda of neoliberalism, because in one way or another they support the neoliberal project as implemented by the Lula government. Any sensible person, whether socialist or capitalist, who wanted to make a precise analysis of the actions of the Lula government, would see the persistent subordination to the parasites of the International Monetary Fund (FMI) and the other multilateral financial

institutions, the distortion of public finances to the benefit of speculation, the reforms which have nothing to do with the reforms of the state apparatus that we have always defended.

We are partisans of reform of this Brazilian state which has been privatized in the service of a minority. On the other hand, the state reforms carried out by the Lula government, following in the footsteps of [his predecessor] Fernando Henrique Cardoso, are only neoliberal counter-reforms involving the sole mechanism of reducing social budgets to compensate for increased financial expenses, the fruit of their economic policy and their monetarist orthodoxy. Workers in the public sector are sacrificed - as was the case with pensions reform - for the benefit of the speculators, while public resources are literally pillaged.

Is all this irreversible? Is there no chance that social tension can change the orientation of the Lula government?

I hope - for the good of Brazil and its millions of oppressed, excluded and marginalized - that the live forces of society will be able, in an organized fashion, to bring pressure for change. But unhappily a number of the social movements are bureaucratized, assuming responsibilities in the governmental structure, and are above all interested in paralyzing their base to stop such social tensions.

It is obvious that I want things to change, but in view of the measures already taken by the government, I don't believe in the objective possibility of a change of orientation. If I can imagine a God who is immaterial and not geographically located, you can bet that I believe in the strength of the Brazilian people and in its capacity to struggle to force the government to change course. Unhappily, the analysis that I make of members of the government is that they have changed side. So we feel obliged to create a "refuge" for the left, so that even if they have changed side, they do capture the legitimacy of left traditions. Starting from the time where they went over to the other side, they are no longer authorized by the Brazilian people - and still less by the Brazilian left - to wipe out and trample on the historic banners which have been sanctified not by this or that political personality or party, but by heroic struggles, by the blood, sweat and tears of the toiling class and the socialist militants in Brazil, Latin America and the world.

These historic reference points and the resulting programmatic conceptions, are not the property of any party, including our new party, the PSoL, or any political personality. If a political instrument which is conceived to promote these historic objectives in the imagination of the popular classes fails, our task is to build a new party.

Do you hope that more PT parliamentarians and cadres will join the PSoL?

The PsoL will welcome comrades from all left parties who wish to join us with pleasure and much affection, solidarity and respect. A number of fighters for the people who have left the PT, the PCdoB, the PSTU and other parties are with us. But I will not spend a drop of sweat and energy to try and tempt away activists in other parties, and still less parliamentarians - if only because the parliamentarians know exactly what is happening.

If these people decide to quit the government and join us, they will be met with open arms. We preserve certain bonds of affection built up in the course of our common history, but it is no longer about doing politics together. Where those bonds of affection have been broken, it is because they were not very strong, or not sincere enough to be maintained despite the ideological and programmatic disagreements of militant life.

Sincerely, I already knew that there was a socialist life, of dignity, courage and generosity, outside of the party structures which exist today - and I have become certain of this in the course of crossing the "desert" to build a new party and meeting fellow travelers. That has been a real apprenticeship for me. I will devote myself more to the conquests of these people rather than the attempt to convince activists and parliamentarians of other parties.

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